

# PREVENTING CHILDHOOD **OBESITY**

## A Healthy Imperative for Connecticut's Next Generation



### Policy Recommendations



**Statewide Forum, November 7, 2008**

**Sponsored By The Connecticut Childhood Obesity Council**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Brownell</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create stronger physical and educational connection with local food</li> <li>• Increase physical education (in PE classes and woven into curriculum)</li> <li>• Small tax on soft drinks and junk foods to generate revenue for nutrition programs earmarked for things like fruits &amp; vegetables in schools, a public education campaign (like the Truth campaign), or building access to healthy foods in poor areas.</li> <li>• State &amp; local programs designed to reverse food deserts (incentives for supermarkets to open in needed areas and for existing small stores to stock healthy foods)</li> <li>• Test the limits of consumer protection and constitutional law to reduce food marketing directed at children (including all forms of media including the internet)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>McCarthy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote and encourage usage of Connecticut state parks and forests for recreational activities. There is a state park or forest located within 10 miles of every town in Connecticut.</li> <li>• Encourage families to register at <a href="http://www.nochildleftinside.org">www.nochildleftinside.org</a> to discover outdoor activities for the whole family.</li> <li>• Educate families on the importance of preserving open space within their communities.</li> <li>• Provide environmental education programs for children to instill a lifelong focus on preserving natural resources.</li> <li>• Make families aware of the healthy benefits of eating locally grown food.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Merrill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous, obesity prevention oriented food standards and the enactment of regulations mandating a daily minimum of physical activity in schools and day care. (See NYC Health Code §§ 47.61 and 47.71);</li> <li>• Calorie labeling of restaurant menus</li> <li>• Taxation of sweetened beverages as Maine has done</li> <li>• Built environment actions encouraging safe routes to school by bike or walking, stair usage, etc.</li> <li>• Increasing access to healthy foods and making Food Stamps go further (In NYC, we have both a Health Bucks and Healthy Bodega campaign).</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Moccia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination: At all levels agencies working to solve this dilemma work together to get the maximum effectiveness from resources. In the City of Norwalk communication among the departments is a key to our success.</li> <li>• Start with the very young: Habits, which we follow throughout our lives, are often formed at a very young age. Make physical activity and good nutrition part of the daily lives of children at a very young age.</li> <li>• Make community facilities available for use: Recently the fields at Norwalk and Brien McMahon High Schools were upgraded and expanded. The fields are used by the schools and are also made available to the community.</li> <li>• The State of Connecticut recognizes the efforts of communities taking the lead by awarding funds to assist in this effort.</li> <li>• Invest in employee wellness. Employees are parents and children follow the example set by their parents. Encouraging and assisting employees to be healthy is important in addressing childhood obesity. There is also a benefit to the City in having healthier employees. Productivity improves and health care costs are better controlled. Let's understand that this requires a long-term commitment.</li> </ul>

**McTiernan**

- At the local, state and federal levels, prioritize increasing fresh food and decreasing processed foods served to children through the School Breakfast and Lunch programs. At the federal level, in particular, we recommend increasing federal reimbursements for school lunches and directly tie that increase to greater use of fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, clarify the nutrition standards for school meals so only healthy, predominately fresh foods meet the criteria.
- Make fresh, healthy food more accessible to Food Stamp recipients by creating an incentive for them to purchase fruits and vegetables with their food assistance benefits. For example, Food Stamps could be worth more money when used for fruits and vegetables purchased at a farmers' market.
- Set a path to better nutrition and healthy eating for mothers and children. Create a culture that promotes and prioritizes good nutrition for expecting mothers, breastfeeding, and overall mother and child nutrition.
- Increase the value of WIC vouchers for use at farmers' markets and for fresh fruits and vegetables. A "report shows that subsidizing fruit and vegetable purchases can make a big difference in eating habits among low-income people, it also suggests that the new amounts recently approved for W.I.C. fall far short of what is needed." - The Farmers' Market Effect, The New York Times
- Celebrate local, healthy food and a culture that values healthy eating! Seek to connect with local farmers through farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA's), and asking your grocers to carry local produce. Share tips on how to cook economically with fresh food.

**Nolan**

- Every severe-need school will have a school breakfast program available during the school day and will be free for all the children in the school. The State Department of Education will have grants to support school districts that serve breakfast after the morning bell and the meals will be free to all children regardless of family income. Innovative and workable ideas will be rewarded.
- The State of Connecticut will increase funding for school meals, to all schools, in order to continue to serve more nutritious and healthier choices for students.
- The State of Connecticut will create a child nutrition outreach program housed in the State Department of Education to fund outreach by community groups to increase participation in the following federal child nutrition programs: Summer Nutrition, School Breakfast, After-school Snacks, and the Child and Adult Care feeding Program.
- The state of Connecticut will fund, through the Department of Public Health, monies to be used for the administration for local WIC offices and will increase outreach for and the number of WIC Farmer Market coupons.
- The Nutrition Assistance Program, which funds the purchase of protein foods and produce for the state's food banks, will be increased by \$2 million. This program feeds Connecticut families, many not eligible for the SNAP program or free or reduced price meals, which need quality, process-free and nutritious foods that the food banks can budget for and ensure availability.

**Chatterton**

- The continued promotion of the Coordinated School Health approach when addressing students' health, as it is critical to recognize the health and well being of the whole child.
- The need for enhanced collaboration at the state and local level (town and school) when promoting Active Community Environments and Safe Routes to School.
- The need for enhanced collaboration and communication between professional organizations and groups that promote physical education and a physically active lifestyle.
- The need for improved communication and cooperation between school, families, medical professionals, and town agency representatives with the ongoing development, implementation, and evaluation of the School's Wellness Policies
- The development of guidelines that require Physical Education classes to have similar class sizes as academic classes

**Washington**

- Free Educational Family Workshops to help change the culture by collaborating with our public, private and home schooled families.
- Collaborate with our local food chain stores, community churches, culinary institutes, wellness and local government agencies. Workshops that teach: Healthy cooking classes; portion control; reading and understanding packaging labels; encouraging families to make healthier choices; resources for available and affordable healthy foods; eating healthier on a tight budget and family exercises.
- Insure that physical education remains a part of the curricula in all schools including team, leagues and intramural sports.
- Collaborate with our cities and towns to develop safe bicycle paths/walking/running trails.
- Coordinate with school boards to insure that their school and snack menus available to the children promote the highest level of nutrition.

**Perez-Escamilla**

- Overweight/obesity before pregnancy increases the risk of excessive weight gain during pregnancy and this in turn increases the amount of postpartum weight retention. Thus prevention of obesity among women before they enter their reproductive age needs to become a national priority.
- Fetal nutrition during pregnancy influences gene expression patterns later on in life that can either protect against or increase the risk for childhood obesity and subsequent chronic diseases.
- Childhood obesity prevention efforts need to start very early in life, even before the mother becomes pregnant. Waiting to address the childhood obesity issue until the kids enter school may be a 'to little, too late' approach.
- Possible points of opportunity for addressing maternal nutrition before pregnancy, during and after pregnancy include: schools, WIC program, and women's health clinics
- Need to improve monitoring and surveillance systems in the state to track obesity secular trends and differentials among women of reproductive age. Because low-income women are disproportionately affected by the obesity epidemic it is essential that these efforts involve adequate collection of racial/ethnic information.

**Jackman**

- Provide tax and/or other incentives to employers whose policies support breastfeeding, such as extended paid leave for breastfeeding mothers, flexible work schedules, on-site childcare, etc.
- Require maternity hospitals to file letters of intent to adopt UNICEF/WHO Baby Friendly Hospital practices within the next 5 years.
- Require maternity hospitals to immediately stop the practice of distributing commercial infant formula discharge bags.
- Appropriate funding to replicate the Hartford-based Breastfeeding: Heritage and Pride breastfeeding peer counseling program statewide.
- Encourage the insurance industry to eliminate co-pays for office visits for breastfeeding mothers and infants, and to pay for office and home visits related to the prevention and treatment of lactation problems.

**Thompson**

- Families eat together
- Family members eat a healthy breakfast every day
- Excess juice and sweetened beverages are limited
- Family members exercise daily
- Television/computer/video game time is limited for all family members

**Campisi DiNatale**

- Help fund interactive parent and child programs to bridge the gap between school wellness policies and the home environment
- Conduct parenting workshops in the community to help parents understand various parenting styles and their outcome on behaviors as it relates to wellness
- Create awareness of local recreation resources by forming a coalition, or using school wellness committees, to provide comfortable entry into new environments where physical activities can take place
- Encourage community hospitals to join in childhood obesity programs that run in accord with school districts such as "Wellness Across America – Jump Start for Kids", by applying for and providing grants that support their formation
- Encourage managed care companies doing business in the state to fund health care services related to obesity treatment and prevention

**Henderson**

- Eliminate competitive foods from all schools – provide only the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- Provide financial support so that food services are sustainable in providing only the NSLP.
- Continue to collect and provide periodic feedback on school wellness policies, and put in a place a system to support and monitor implementation of policies.
- Schools, childcare centers, and after-school programs should be brand-free environments. Companies are free to donate to schools, but anything the children see should not have a company name or logo on it.
- Adopt state nutrition standards for preschools and childcare centers that move beyond Child and Adult Care Food Program standards. One starting point would be the New York City childcare nutrition and physical activity standards.

**Fiore**

- All school districts implement Healthy Food Certification.
- All school districts implement the Coordinated School Health Approach, especially as it relates to nutrition, physical activity and tobacco use prevention.
- All school districts collect and use data to inform all programs and policies.
- All school districts implement comprehensive health education, including nutrition education, in all grades in a planned, ongoing and systematic manner.
- All school districts implement physical education and physical activity in all grades in a planned, ongoing and systematic manner.

**Gaughan**

- Promote Physical Activity- in schools and communities by advocating for recess, physical education classes, after-school programs, youth sports, and community recreation.
- Provide access to affordable, nutritious foods through out the food supply, from school lunch programs to supermarket choices, restaurants and farmers markets.
- Help parents, teachers, coaches and mentors to model healthy eating behaviors by providing educational training and resources.
- Support the creation of nutrition and wellness education in schools that is evidence-based, yet fun and engaging.
- Foster relationships and provide funding for state colleges and universities students to participate in service learning programs.

**Lopez**

- Funds should be available to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to middle school level programs to be used for a snack outside of the lunch program; in essence our very own CT fresh fruit and vegetable program. We have seen the FFVP work well in the middle school, and feel students at this age level are learning to make their own decisions and the program exposes them to better choices for snacking. The federal program will be focusing on elementary children who may eat vegetables when they still are very influenced by their parents.
- Provide nutrition education opportunities in schools for parents to become better informed on nutrition basics. Encouragement for parents who are finding the challenges of feeding their children healthy meals and influencing them to make good choices are difficult. Emphasis should be made for parents of middle and high school children.
- State of CT legislature should look at the funding provided to our school meal programs. State matching funds currently are a block grant and the total on the grant has not changed in more than 24 years. The number of students being served lunch in our schools has risen tremendously. This means our funding per child decreases each year. We currently receive about \$.041 cents per meal to use to defray the costs of production, which include labor, food, sanitation, and training costs. Recent research indicates that the cost to produce a school lunch nationally is over \$3.40. Federal reimbursement per meal is \$.25 for every child who pays for their meal and \$2.57 for a child who qualifies for meals for free. *(More on the last page of this handout)*

**Martin**

- Expand School Wellness Policies to include additional schools and increase state subsidies for schools to offer healthier meals.
- Require labeling of calories in chain restaurants, following the NYC model.
- In small markets, promote low-fat milk as an alternative to whole milk and soda.
- For school and club fundraisers, use alternative strategies that do not include junk food and candy to reverse the culture of rewarding children with sweets.
- Create state and local parent campaigns to promote physical activity by encouraging kids to reduce screen time and increase active playtime.

**Slupecki**

- Buy local.
- Support the CT Farm To School Program; ask for CT Grown in your schools, institutions, restaurants and places of work.
- Support initiatives to increase the agricultural base in Connecticut, like Farmland
- Preservation that permanently protects agricultural and aquacultural resources.
- Respect and nurture laws pertaining to agriculture, especially the Right to Farm.
- Enjoy Connecticut agriculture, its cultural heritage, the views and vistas, and be aware of its contribution to the state's economy. Connecticut agriculture is important to us all!

**DeBor, J.D.**

- Communities: Establish a "coordinating council" of local leaders with a vested interest in and ability to effect change in health status of residents of the community the purposes of which is to 1) raise awareness and validate the existence of the obesity problem throughout the organizations that they represent; 2) foster the exchange of ideas to address the problem and 3) then implement programs that coordinate and leverage all available resources to achieve the common goal of reversing the obesity epidemic.
- Support implementation of your public school's wellness by creating a school garden that utilizes the experience across the curriculum to educate children about what real food is, where it comes from and why it is important to human health (e.g. science; history local agricultural heritage, native seeds from area and beyond).
- A walking program that ties local businesses to the school, as sponsors and active participation in the classroom, heightening community involvement in the school system. New Milford has a model program at Sarah Noble School.
- Participate in the programs of the Department of Agriculture, such as the Farm to School program
- Engage your local hospital in offering disease prevention programs and expanding its mission statement to include a commitment and community-based programs to promote wellness and disease prevention. New Milford Hospital has done so by creating the "Plow to Plate™" initiative.
- Capitalize on the state-wide "Nurturing Families" program in your area to ensure that the activities offered include healthful eating, nutrition education and physical fitness as well as providing a supportive social network for mothers to learn about child health, share ideas and become advocates for their children's health as they move through the school system and available community programs.
- State Action: Immediately form an intergovernmental committee of representative agencies with the power and mandate to coordinate policy, programs and regulations that have, or can have an impact on reversing the epidemic of obesity and associated diseases in Connecticut. Such agencies should include: Departments of Health, Agriculture, Education, Office of Health Care Access and the Department of Environmental Protection. This core group can access other agencies, when needed. A small example of the successful elimination of conflicting policies was revision of the Department of Health restrictions on direct purchase of food products from farmers, which was defeating the goals of the very proactive and successful programs of the Department of Agriculture to promote local foods and farmers.
- Coordination that results in meaningful action by Connecticut at the state level can serve as a model for the federal government to integrate policies and legislation with a profound impact on the obesity epidemic. For example, current agriculture policies, in particular federal subsidies of certain crops such as corn, translates into cheap processed foods that results in children who are overfed (and obese) yet undernourished, while the Department of Health and Human Services a host of expensive child health programs the goals of which can never be met if basic change in the food system does not occur. Policies that are in conflict with each other and serve as serious barriers to reversing the obesity epidemic must be systematically identified and then reconciled with the common goal of disease prevention.

**Fry**

- A change in policy is essential giving priority to walk-ability and bike-ability at the state and local level. Promote strategic investment in bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure and strategic trails development.
- Complete Streets: Every transportation project is an opportunity to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety
- Land use planning and development (Dense, multi use; careful location of public facilities, particularly schools)
- Utilize and promote the facilities: Market the trails to nearby neighborhoods and encourage use with maps, programs, and group activities
- Safe Routes to Schools: Implement Safe Routes in all elementary and middle schools. Integrate with wellness plans.

**Callahan**

- Provide ample opportunities for children to be active and eat nutritious food.
- Make state funding awards for regional and or statewide programs. As an example, the NorWalker program could very easily be replicated on at least the lower Fairfield County towns. The development and marketing costs would be spread over a much larger universe.
- Step up efforts to make the built environment more conducive to physical activity.
- Establish a statewide recognition program for food establishments serving nutritious balanced meals.
- Develop risk-sharing contracts between providers (managed care companies) and employers based on health status of the covered lives.

**Goldberg**

- Conduct an evaluation/assessment/audit of every community with respect to the extent of the problem. Then develop a plan based on some pre-established criteria to help communities to address it.
- If the state does not mandate BMI screening and tracking, it should begin to do so and use the data from the process to promote policies to address the pediatric obesity problem.

**Lopez (cont)**

- Breakfast programs should be mandatory and snack programs should be more strongly encouraged in every school, not just in high need areas. Physiologically the human body will store calories as fat or permanent storage if it goes into the starvation mode. That mode happens 4 hours after eating. If the human body eats a meal every four hours then the excess calories that are not used at that point is stored in the temporary storage of glycogen, which is easy to retrieve. But if the child goes longer without eating then the body is training itself to always put any excess calories into fat storage because you never know when your next meal is coming. Skipping meals slows down the metabolism. Eating frequent meals increases the metabolism. Basically humans have to eat in order to lose weight or to prevent from gaining weight. Children should not skip breakfast, as this can be a sure way to obesity.
- The walking bus should be encouraged. In towns where busing is necessary, provide bus stops with jump ropes. If the state purchases 2 large ropes and it is given to parents who go to the bus stops to turn the rope while waiting for the bus, it could keep the kids busy and before you know it they will get out there early so they can jump rope before the bus shows up. Experience has proven that even the local bully will jump if asked to participate.